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Latin America Review

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7 December 1984

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**Latin America
Review**

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Articles have been coordinated as appropriate with other offices within CIA. Comments and queries regarding this publication may be directed to the Chief, Production Staff, Office of African and Latin American Analysis,

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Articles

Costa Rica: Communists in Transition

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After years of stability and moderation, the Costa Rican Communists are becoming radicalized through identification with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Even longtime moderate leader, Manuel Mora Valverde, has moved considerably to the left. He has supported the presence of a Costa Rican Communist brigade in Nicaragua to help fight anti-Sandinista insurgents, and has encouraged his party members to avail themselves of Nicaraguan training. We see the current split in the party more as a function of generational politics than ideological differences and believe Mora's break with traditional moderation is an effort to maintain his credibility with today's more militant youth. We expect the Costa Rican Communist movement to continue to move away from the moderate posture of past years, in part because Mora is grooming his son, who commands the party's brigade in Nicaragua, as heir apparent.

Five Decades of Moderation

For five decades Costa Rica's Communists, who at present number about 7,000 out of a total population of 2.7 million, had been politically pragmatic, largely nonviolent, and open to dialogue and negotiation. Led by founder Manuel Mora Valverde and his brother Eduardo, the Communist Popular Vanguard Party chose to seek power until the last few years through the ballot box rather than through violence. As recently as 1981, second-in-command Eduardo Mora stated that the party sought social and structural change but would resist the introduction of political terror from either the left or the right.

At home in San Jose, the Moras—especially Manuel—enjoyed considerable credibility and recognition. Long a fixture in Costa Rican politics and known for his role in Costa Rica's 1948

revolution, Manuel Mora has long had access to mainstream politicians including Jose "Pepe" Figueres, the father of modern Costa Rican democracy. Additionally, until 1982 Mora's party had made small but steady electoral gains, and, despite their minimal impact, Mora apparently was encouraged to continue working within the system.

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Although a moderate Communist in the domestic political arena, Manuel Mora has supported more militant efforts by his Latin neighbors. US Embassy officials in San Jose reported in 1982 that he resisted foreign encouragement toward armed struggle in Costa Rica and preferred to support revolution elsewhere.

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In Havana in 1982, Manuel Mora publicly applauded his party's "internationalist" tradition in support of revolution in other countries.

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Catalyst for Change

We believe the Nicaraguan revolution and subsequent progress toward its consolidation have strongly influenced the Costa Rican Communists and precipitated their shift toward the left. The majority of Costa Ricans supported the Sandinistas' overthrow of Anastasio Somoza in late 1979, but, while most subsequently became disillusioned with the increasingly totalitarian drift of the revolution, the Costa Rican Communists grew closer to the new regime in Managua.

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The Nicaraguan revolution gave Mora and his fellow Communists an opportunity to put ideological beliefs into practice. Moreover, Mora could now make good on his pledge to support revolutions elsewhere in the spirit of "internationalism." [redacted]

Brigade reportedly must be funded by the Costa Rican left—putting a tremendous strain on party finances. Nevertheless, [redacted]

[redacted] the Moras hope to send additional candidates to Nicaragua for officer training and that the Moras believe preserving the Nicaraguan revolution is of paramount importance to the Communist movement at the present time. [redacted]

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Increasing numbers of Costa Rican leftists, in our judgment, probably have been influenced by the example of the Sandinista revolution as a possible alternative to the legal process for achieving power. Communist influence via legitimate channels continues to be extremely limited, and rejection at the polls may make armed struggle a more palatable option. Since 1980, [redacted] membership in the party has decreased for the first time. In 1982 the leftist coalition won scarcely 3 percent of the vote and gained only four seats out of 57 in the Legislative Assembly. [redacted]

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Shortly after April 1983, when anti-Sandinista insurgents began their southern offensive along the Costa Rican border, the Costa Rican Communists responded again to the Sandinistas' military needs.

[redacted] at Manuel Mora's initiation, a military brigade—known as the Mora-Canas Brigade and led by Mora's son, Manuel Mora Salas—was founded and sent to southern Nicaragua to fight the insurgents. [redacted]

The depth of Mora's identification with the Sandinistas, [redacted] was reflected in his assertion that the Mora faction had given "its own blood" to the Nicaraguan revolution. [redacted]

In our judgment, generational tension among Costa Rican Communists also has contributed to their shift away from moderation. Over the past few years, Mora, now in his seventies, had been challenged and sometimes upstaged by younger rival Humberto Vargas Carbonell, a more militant partisan in his fifties. [redacted] Mora and Vargas particularly disagreed about the disposition of the Mora-Canas Brigade. In contrast to Mora's belief in the primacy of the Nicaraguan revolution, Vargas reportedly wanted the Brigade to form the backbone of an insurgent force to foment armed insurrection in Costa Rica. [redacted]

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Despite hardships, disease, deprivation, and lack of funds, the Mora-Canas Brigade remains ideologically committed to the Sandinistas, and [redacted]

[redacted] as of November 1984 as many as 500 Costa Ricans were fighting anti-Sandinista insurgents in Nicaragua. Although the Sandinistas provide arms, supplies of food and medicine for the

In late 1983 Vargas engineered a drive to oust Mora from the position of Secretary General of the Popular Vanguard Party. Although Vargas won the title, the ensuing power struggle split the party. We believe

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that, in order to siphon support from Vargas and appeal to the younger generation, Mora gradually had to become more radical. []

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Manuel Mora's response to Vargas's challenge appears to be bridging the generational gap. []

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[] most Popular Vanguard Party members left Vargas and have followed Mora into his newly established second Communist party, the People's Party of Costa Rica. The Mora-Canas Brigade also has fallen in behind the new party, leaving Vargas without a trained paramilitary unit. Moreover, [] to assure continuity of the Mora dynasty and presumably to continue his appeal to the youth sector, Manuel Mora is grooming his son as heir apparent rather than his brother, Eduardo. []

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Outlook

Over the next six months, we expect Manuel Mora will continue to consolidate his new party's power base and continue to recruit for and support the Mora-Canas Brigade. If the Sandinistas are able to continue the consolidation of their revolution, we may find Mora—impressed by Sandinista success—becoming publicly bolder in support of their cause. []

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In all likelihood, the schism between the Mora and the Vargas factions will continue to widen, although both probably will support the same candidate in the presidential election next year. There is little chance of a real reconciliation between the two Costa Rican Communist parties in the short term. In the event, however, that the Sandinistas are seriously threatened by the anti-Sandinista insurgents, the Costa Rican left may be more inclined to unite and come to their aid. []

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Trinidad and Tobago: Ruling Party Prospects

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Prime Minister Chambers's People's National Movement is facing a serious challenge to its longstanding control of the country as a result of a worsening economy, eroding labor support, opposition unification, and weak leadership. The Chambers government's inability to combat the rapid economic downturn following the fall of world oil prices has cost the party popular support, as evidenced by the People's National Movement's unprecedented defeat in local elections in Trinidad last year. The ruling party's defeat in the Tobago House of Assembly elections last month—the People's National Movement won only one of the 12 seats—may well serve as a barometer for the general elections, due by mid-1987.



Prime Minister George Chambers

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Mounting Economic Problems

Economic activity in Trinidad and Tobago is likely to fall 3 percent in 1984, following a 2.6-percent decline in 1983. Petroleum sales, which contribute 75 percent of the country's export earnings, have been depressed due to the sharp drop in world oil prices and excess refining capacity in the United States. Crude oil production in Trinidad has dropped nearly 30 percent below the peak 1978 level. As Trinidad and Tobago's oil revenues and foreign reserves have steadily declined, the government belatedly has tightened controls on imports and withdrawn subsidies that have long cushioned consumers against inflation.

result, labor unrest has increased in the past year, with strike actions hitting most major industrial installations. In addition, a work slowdown by most of the country's 65,000 public-sector workers—demonstrating rejection of the government's wage contract proposals—brought the country nearly to a standstill in September.

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Most workers, including the salaried middle class, have been hurt badly by belt tightening and are showing signs of restiveness. The unemployment rate now tops 20 percent. Wage increases—particularly high during the oil boom of the 1970s—are now held down, often below the rate of inflation.

Prospects are slim for economic improvement before general elections must be held. Continued energy conservation will keep demand for Caribbean petroleum products from growing much over the next few years. We believe that Trinidad and Tobago's recent agreement in principle to purchase Texaco's unprofitable refinery at Point a Pierre and on-island producing fields for \$175 million could unravel because of the heavy additional drain on the country's foreign exchange reserves. In an effort to centralize its

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organized labor—the most significant pressure group in the country—perceives the government's implementation of austerity measures as an attempt to make the workers bear the brunt of the economic sacrifices and to undermine the labor movement. As a

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refining operations, the government tentatively plans to close its Trintoc refinery, a move that will eliminate 2,000 to 2,600 jobs. Earlier this year, the powerful Oilfield Workers Trade Union pledged not to strike the refinery should the government take over operations. We believe the unanticipated large loss of jobs, however, could prompt the union to reconsider its decision. []

Opposition Gains

In August, amid rumors that Chambers intended to call a snap election, the opposition National Alliance—comprising the United Labor Front, the Democratic Action Congress, and Tapia House—and the Organization for National Reconstruction issued a joint statement announcing the formation of an opposition unity group calling itself the National Alliance for Reconstruction. The move accorded official status to the informal electoral accommodation that defeated the ruling party in Trinidad's local elections last year. The People's National Movement's defeat—of the 120 seats contested, the ruling party captured only 45—was a stunning reversal of the party's 101-to-13 victory in 1981. We believe the defeat was due largely to popular dissatisfaction with the ruling party, perceived by most voters as corrupt and unresponsive after 25 years in office. Moreover, it was the first time the party had faced a strong and unified opposition.

The consolidation of the opposition parties into a single electoral entity appears to have given new life to the historically weak and fragmented opposition and may seriously threaten the People's National Movement's tenure in office. The appointment of A. N. R. Robinson—whose Democratic Action Congress recently defeated the People's National Movement in the Tobago House of Assembly elections—as head of the National Alliance for Reconstruction caused great concern within the ruling party, []

[] We believe that People's National Movement leaders view Robinson's victory in the Tobago election on 26 November as a significant boost to his national political stature, attracting additional popular support for the opposition alliance. The ruling party was soundly defeated despite conducting a vigorous campaign,



A. N. R. Robinson, head of the National Alliance for Reconstruction []

seemingly out of proportion to Tobago's small population—4 percent of the country's 1.2 million total. []

[] the People's National Movement brought hundreds of party supporters to Tobago to attend rallies and harass the opposition. Chambers and several ruling party cabinet and parliament members made several trips to the island. Most voters, however, wary of the unprecedented attention from the Prime Minister and his party, were unswayed by Chambers's efforts to gain support from the intensely parochial Tobagonians. []

[] senior People's National Movement officials have [] declared themselves "disenchanted" with Chambers's leadership and place much of the blame for the party's loss of popular support on Chambers's lackluster performance as Prime Minister. Increasingly, Chambers is perceived as weak and vacillating, unable to control government corruption and inefficiency. Many party officials also believe the Prime Minister staked too much of his personal prestige on the Tobago election, to the detriment of the party. []

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We believe party leaders are resigned to continue supporting Chambers, fearing that any effort to replace him would split the party and practically guarantee an opposition victory in the next general elections. Despite discontent with Chambers's leadership, his position went unchallenged in the party's national convention in September. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] the ruling party instead has decided to concentrate on bolstering its image as a government of and for blacks—who comprise nearly half the country's population—apparently counting on the People's National Movement's traditional base of black urban support to be enough to sustain the party in its struggle to remain in power. [REDACTED]

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Paraguay: Political Stirrings []

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Political infighting appears to be increasing in Paraguay as various groups anticipate President Stroessner's possible retirement when his current term ends in 1988. The struggle is between those who hope for democratic reform after Stroessner's departure and those who favor continued authoritarian rule. The groups supporting reform have been encouraged over the past year, in our view, by the restoration of democracy elsewhere in South America, particularly in neighboring Argentina. []

Party Activity

The ruling Colorado Party, together with the armed forces, is virtually certain to play a central role in shaping the eventual transition, according to US Embassy []. Within the ruling party, two groups are vying for dominance—a hardline faction that unreservedly endorses Stroessner's tough, authoritarian approach, and a relatively moderate grouping that favors a more open system. Over the years, the hardliners generally have been the more powerful of the two groups because of their close ties to Stroessner. Their dominance has never been absolute, however, and it now appears to be eroding. []

According to US Embassy reporting, the growing strength of the more moderate faction stems from the fact that during the Stroessner era, economic development and expanding ties with the outside world through modern transportation and communications have created a new middle class that desires a more responsive political system. In September, the moderates demonstrated their strength by successfully pressuring the hardliners—and Stroessner himself—to abandon efforts to appoint the President's private secretary, a member of the hardline group, to a senior party post. This episode marked one of the rare occasions during Stroessner's 30-year rule that a dispute within the ruling party has been aired in the Paraguayan press. []

The Colorado moderates' desire for a more open and responsive system is generally shared by Paraguay's various opposition parties—both those that take part in elections and those that refuse to participate or are prohibited from doing so by the government. Over the past year, opposition groups have stepped up public rallies in Paraguay and Argentina and reiterated demands for an easing of repression and the release of political prisoners. []

Following the inauguration last December of civilian Argentine President Alfonsin, Stroessner permitted some opposition members to return from exile as a gesture to the new Argentine leader. Subsequently, however, he reverted to his longstanding policy of harassing and intimidating opponents, and he shut down a leading newspaper and suspended a radio announcer for criticizing the regime. Although the opposition parties still are too weak and divided to influence the course of events decisively, their importance may well increase after the Stroessner era comes to an end, in our view. Some of the opposition parties could try to align themselves with moderates in the Colorado Party. []

The Military

Besides the Colorado Party, the other major pillar of the Stroessner regime is the armed forces. The military is dominated by hardline senior officers who are personally loyal to the President. According to the US Embassy, the hardliners' loyalty—like that of their counterparts in the Colorado Party—stems to a considerable degree from their being allowed to engage in a variety of lucrative business activities, both legal and illegal. []

Sources of the US defense attache in Asuncion report growing dissatisfaction on the part of middle-grade officers over the extensive corruption among military

and civilian leaders and the failure of senior officers to share the fruits of their activities with subordinates. This grumbling has not been serious enough, in our judgment, to lead to any efforts to force a change of leadership, but we believe that in a post-Stroessner transition period some of the younger officers may side with those civilians who seek a less arbitrary and more open system of government. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

For now, Stroessner remains firmly entrenched, and we see no sign of any serious challenges to his authority. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] There is no evidence that Paraguay will take significant steps toward a more open political system while he is in power. [REDACTED]

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Nevertheless, the competition between adherents of the status quo and those who favor change has increased—with the moderates gaining some ground—and is likely to intensify as the transition approaches. If Stroessner does leave office during the next few years, the two camps are likely to battle over the choice of his successor from among the senior figures within the regime. The choice probably would be made through consensus among military and Colorado leaders or by Stroessner himself. According to US Embassy reporting, leading candidates at this point include several powerful Army generals as well as Supreme Court President Luis Maria Argana, an experienced Colorado politician who has steered a careful course between the factions. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Dominican Republic: Protests Against Austerity [REDACTED]

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Public demonstrations against President Jorge Blanco's belt-tightening measures have increased in recent weeks, but we do not believe the country's stability is being threatened. The President's differing responses to the protests underscore his willingness to allow, if not encourage, legitimate political protest while keeping a tight lid on violence-prone groups. As hard times continue to depress living standards, however, Jorge Blanco is likely to face additional—and perhaps more serious—threats to public order.

[REDACTED]

Violent student protests last month underscore growing popular frustration with the country's economic difficulties. According to press and US Embassy reports, leftist-dominated student groups at the large Autonomous University in Santo Domingo spearheaded the disturbances. Clashes between police and rock-throwing students demanding an end to government talks with the IMF and increases in the university budget resulted in the temporary closure of the university. Demonstrations—some involving high school students—also were reported in several large cities in the interior. During the disturbances—which occurred sporadically over a two-week period—several government-owned food stores were looted.

[REDACTED]

The administration's hardline response to the student protests, the largest that the government has faced during the past six months, illustrates the President's determination to curb the activities of radical extremists. Riot police used tear gas to control students, and, according to press reports, soldiers and special police urban control units were sent in to back up the regular police in some areas. Embassy and press reports indicate security forces arrested some 300 individuals. Military leaders issued sharp warnings that they would not tolerate efforts—from the left or the right—to upset the legally established order.

[REDACTED]

The US Embassy in Santo Domingo says faculty and administrators of the National University also put pressure on the administration to increase federal subsidies to the university. Demonstrations in front of the National Palace and the congressional building drew thousands of participants including students. In a separate but related event, some 12,000 members of Juan Bosch's pro-Cuban Dominican Liberation Party turned out in late November to demand an end to talks with the IMF, an increase in minimum wages, and the nationalization of Gulf and Western properties on the island.

[REDACTED]

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No violence was reported in the latter demonstrations, however. According to the US Embassy, the participants—unlike the university student groups—received permission from the Secretariat of Interior to hold their marches. Moreover, by meeting with university leaders in front of the National Palace and promising to “help,” Jorge Blanco was able to reduce tensions.

[REDACTED]

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Jorge Blanco's dual-track policy in handling protesters has limited the spread of antigovernment sentiment thus far. In addition, by taking a moderate course in dealing with peaceful demonstrators, we believe he has reinforced the idea that benefits can be gained by playing by the rules and strengthening the country's democratic traditions. Jorge Blanco's moderation has its limits, however. The Army reportedly put pressure on Bosch to stop trying to drum up support among the military's rank and file for a wage hike.

[REDACTED]

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Jorge Blanco's apparent determination to adopt and maintain an IMF-endorsed austerity program, is likely to provoke more antigovernment

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demonstrations in the months ahead, in our view.

Indeed, [redacted]
that military leaders foresee no end to protests, [redacted]

[redacted] the pro-Cuban
Socialist Bloc is planning to increase its support for
student and labor demands. With national elections
scheduled for early 1986 and recent public opinion
polls showing Juan Bosch's popularity on the rise, we
expect him to support more frequent protests.
Nevertheless, because of the lukewarm public
reaction to radical leftist efforts to mobilize
antigovernment sentiment, the military's strong
backing of Jorge Blanco, and the President's
demonstrated political acumen, we believe there is
little chance of serious social unrest that could
undermine the country's stability any time soon.

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Latin America Briefs

Belize

Election Announced

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Belize is about to hold its first national election since gaining independence in 1981. Prime Minister Price, a moderate who is generally pro-US, formally dissolved the National Assembly in mid-November and called for a general election on 14 December. The opposition United Democratic Party appears increasingly cohesive, and we believe the long-governing People's United Party could face its stiffest challenge yet. Although Price appears likely to retain control of the government, we expect the opposition to improve its standing in the House of Representatives, where—before recent redistricting expanded the body to 28 members—it held only five of 18 seats. Meanwhile, the ruling party's small but influential leftist faction reportedly is taking steps to guard its position in the government.

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Peru

APRA's Revised Foreign Policy Program

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Center-left presidential front-runner Alan Garcia of the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) has tentatively approved a foreign policy platform that contains far less anti-US rhetoric than party radicals had originally proposed, Garcia reportedly objected to the original draft, which blamed Washington for Peru's current economic difficulties, demanded the exclusion of the United States from hemispheric organizations, praised the USSR and its allies for their "anti-imperialist" stances, and advocated normalizing relations with Cuba. The current document takes a more moderate tack: emphasizing Peru's role as a Third World leader, toning down controversial ideological statements, and calling for good relations with both the United States and the USSR.

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Antigua

Succession Plans Stalelated

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Prime Minister Vere Bird's efforts to name his son, Deputy Prime Minister Lester Bird, as his successor have been frustrated by strong opposition within the ruling Labor Party. instead of stepping down on 1 November as he had originally planned, he has now postponed plans for retirement indefinitely.

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The Prime Minister now intends to remain in office as

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long as his health permits, hoping that his son eventually can strengthen his popular and party support. If this fails, Prime Minister Bird apparently is willing to hold a popular referendum to settle the succession question. [REDACTED]

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Although growing friction over the succession issue could seriously weaken the Labor Party, we believe the party—or a faction of it—will continue to control the government. The moderate opposition is fragmented, leaderless, and unable to muster strength to challenge even a fractured Labor Party. Moreover, the left-leaning Antigua Caribbean Liberation Movement also is unlikely to pose a significant electoral challenge. [REDACTED] the Movement is trying to project itself as a viable alternative by seeking a merger with one of the moderate opposition parties. We believe they will not succeed in the near term, because none of the moderate opposition parties has any significant popular following, and it is unlikely that the Movement—despite recent efforts to soften its leftist image—will be able to attract much support from the conservative, pro-West Antiguan populace. [REDACTED]

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Argentina

University Elections [REDACTED]

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Elections in Argentina's university system have dealt a setback to President Alfonsin's Radical Party. In 1983, the Radicals' strong showing in student elections foreshadowed the party's sweep of the national election later that year. This year, support for Radical candidates in university elections dropped nearly 10 points to 32 percent, while the leftist Intransigent Party trebled its strength to 20 percent and a new center-right coalition made a strong initial showing of 7 percent. Communist and several rival Peronist student groups were virtually shut out of the contest, while independent slates maintained their 1983 standing. [REDACTED]

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The emergence of strong competition to the Radicals from both the right and the left at the university level suggests that the broad national electoral coalition created by Alfonsin in 1983 is beginning to fray. We believe that many conservatives and leftists who backed the centrist Radical Party last year as a hedge against Peronism are now returning to their normal political moorings. [REDACTED]

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Over the past years, the Peronists have articulated both leftwing and rightwing discontent, but the movement's unseemly public squabbling during and since last year's election campaign and failure to renovate itself following its historic defeat have reduced its appeal to students, and probably to the electorate at large. Neither the Intransigents nor the center-right can yet challenge Alfonsin at the national level, but they are likely to do well in contests—such as next year's congressional elections—where the President's considerable personal popularity is not an overriding factor. [REDACTED]

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Barbados

Ruling Party Wins Byelection

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The narrow victory by the Barbados Labor Party in last month's special election probably reflects the strong personal efforts of Prime Minister Adams rather than a grounds well of public support for the party. The opposition Democratic Labor Party had won the initial byelection for the vacated seat last July, but the runoff was made necessary when the results were invalidated by the Barbadian High Court. Stung by its setback in July, the ruling party ran a more aggressive race, highlighted in the last days by the door-to-door campaigning of the Prime Minister. According to the US Embassy, government aid to flood victims in the electoral district also worked in favor of the ruling party candidate. The opposition candidate, on the other hand, reportedly turned in a generally lackluster performance. The victory was the first byelection win by a ruling party since 1958 and will boost the party's morale, but we believe the country's faltering economy will continue to work against Adams's chances for retaining office in the national elections that are due under constitutional provisions in 1986.

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